

Dancers Can Act

Rita Cansino, Seventeen-Year-Old Daughter of a Famous Spanish Family, Heads for Stardom on the Screen

By Gelal Talata

WHEN George Bernard Shaw told a famous beauty who proposed marriage to him, on the theory that their children would have her looks and his brains, "but what if the children have my beauty and your brains," he was being funny in his own inimitable way.

Which makes me wonder what he would have said had he first been able to see Rita Cansino, the fiery Spanish-Irish girl who danced so bewitchingly in "Under the Pampas Moon" and "Dante's Inferno." For Rita, the offspring of a dancer and an actress, has the talents of both parents, in addition to unusual beauty.

She is the daughter of Eduardo Cansino, famous Spanish dancer, and Volga Haworth, dramatic actress, and Rita has such a combination of looks and talent that she was seriously considered for the starring role in "Ramona," in spite of the fact that she was practically unknown to picture audiences. Instead she was given a lesser part in "Hawk of the Desert."

For generations the Cansinos, of Seville, Spain, have been famous for their interpretation of Moorish, Gypsy and Spanish dancing, and Rita has followed in the family tradition. Eduardo Cansino started teaching her the intricate steps of his native dances from the day she first toddled across the floor to him.

MY FIRST contact with the Cansino family was at the Palace Theater in New York City, where Eduardo and his sister, Elisa, were headlining as a dance team. We had adjoining dressing rooms. The acquaintanceship, however, proved a short one because in those days the acts used to break up in Gotham. Mine went to Brooklyn, the Cansinos' to Chicago.

The next time I met a Cansino was in Mexico, where Eduardo was dancing with Rita, this time at the Foreign Club in Tiajuana. Elisa had married and settled in Los Angeles, where she had opened a dance studio.

From Tiajuana we all moved to the Casino at Agua Caliente, and it was here that Fox studio officials saw Rita and, impressed by her beauty and talent, signed her to a contract.

The other day I saw Rita at the Twentieth Century-Fox studios. We had quite a talk. Naturally it revolved in the main about her motion picture work. And honestly, when we got through I didn't know whether to feel glad or sorry for her. Such bewilderment I have not seen in a long time. She just didn't know what it was all about. She was just a tired little girl, a wee bit frightened. The idea that some day she might be up with the Dietrichs, the Garbos and others of similar screen fame seemed to be just little too much for her youthful mind to grasp.

I am willing to stake a hot puppy that there has been many a time since Rita started in pictures that she would have been a leg to be back in Caliente where she really got her start. What with rehearsals three hours a day, riding until you get blisters, then more dancing, just in case she has forgotten something, hairdressers, make-up men and photographers—well, would you wonder what she does with all her spare time?

"How do you feel about all this?" I asked her. "Do you want to become another Dolores Del Rio?"

It took a little time for her to answer, because every time she turned to look at me or open her mouth to say a word, the hairdresser would give her head another jerk. She was having her coiffure dressed for tests she was making that afternoon.

"No, I don't want to become another Dolores Del Rio. I want to remain Rita Cansino. If I become a star I want to do so in my own right, and not because

I imitated somebody else. I believe that most of my people have made that mistake of trying to be some other picture personality, thereby losing their own identity completely," she finally said.

Rita has a mind of her own and knows how to use it. Yet she expresses herself, and did this time, in a shy, different way.

"At first this business of being a picture player was fun. Then exciting," she told me. "But now, I know it means only one thing—work."

It was good to learn that this sudden success had not gone to Rita's head. That she had remained the same sweet girl who had shared a dressing room with me at the Foreign Club in Tiajuana. The same girl who loaned me her wild Spanish earrings, flowers and Spanish combs. The naive youngster who taught me how to eat tacos, the flat Mexican bread rolled and stuffed with chicken. The youngster who in return for all this used my perfume and tried to beat me at rummy. It was, for Hollywood, quite refreshing.

Rita Cansino danced in two pictures, and immediately Hollywood made her a dramatic actress. Below she appears with Gary Leon, with whom she danced in "Dante's Inferno."



BUT it really shouldn't have been unexpected. Rita is retiring to a fault. Never has much to say. Is gentle in manner, like all well-born Latins and Celts. In appearance she is of medium height. She has a flawless ivory white skin, and the beautifully carved features of the Castilian Spanish. Her hair is midnight black, worn parted in the center and dropped in a soft knot on the back of her neck. She is one of those rare few who still wear their hair long. She is only 17 years old.

Rita's debut as a professional dancer came three years ago at the Carthay Circle in Los Angeles, shortly before she went to Mexico with her father. Her screen debut was made in "Dante's Inferno," where she danced with Gary Leon. Then came "Under the Pampas Moon," dancing again, and "Charlie Chan in Egypt," in which she played a straight dramatic role with no dancing.

It is hard to prophesy just what Rita's eventual niche will be on the screen. On the mother's side the drama has been of most importance, and she has that ingrained in her. One grandparent, Joseph Haworth, was a noted Shakespearean actor in the time of Junius Brutus Booth. And today an uncle, Vincent Haworth, is "Jack Arnold" of radio's "Myrt and Marge." On the paternal side, now headed by her grandfather, Antonio Cansino, Rita comes from what is considered the leading dancing family of all Spain.

Volga Haworth and Eduardo met while appearing in the Dillingham-Shubert hit "Follow Me" and married soon afterward.

Some time before, Eduardo had come to this country with his sister, Elisa, at the suggestion of the late Mrs. Stuyvesant Fish, who had seen the pair dance before the King and Queen of Spain. They later appeared at Rector's and on the Orpheum circuit. Today Eduardo is a dance director at the Twentieth Century-Fox studios. He is closely watching Rita's every move—guiding her as he did when he taught her how to handle the castanets and do the mad whirl of the fandango as a child. But it will be both father and mother that she will have to thank when she becomes a star—for from each of them came the gifts which would bring stardom.